



State of Wisconsin Dept. of Natural Resources

Medical Waste



FOR GENERATORS OF SMALL AMOUNTS

Are you among the many businesses, health care providers, farmers and others who generate less than 50 pounds per month (lb/mo) of infectious waste? If so, this fact sheet will help you manage your infectious waste safely and may also help reduce your costs. If you generate infectious waste only at home, please refer to the DNR brochure "Disposing of Household Sharps" (Publication WA-804) instead of this fact sheet.

Safety requirements Safety requirements—rules for containing, handling, storing, transporting, treating and disposing of infectious waste—apply to everyone who generates or manages infectious waste in Wisconsin. This fact sheet summarizes the most important safety requirements found in the state's medical waste rule (chapter NR 526, Wis. Adm. Code). See s. NR 526.04(8), Wis. Adm. Code for exact citations of the safety requirements. To obtain a paper copy of ch. NR 526 and guidance, please order the "Medical Waste Package" (Publication WA-821) from DNR. Although we are unable to offer the entire Package electronically, the rule and some guidance are available on the DNR's web site (<http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>).

Source separation By law, you must keep non-infectious waste out of infectious waste containers (see s. NR 526.06, Wis. Adm. Code). Infectious wastes include: sharps, i.e., needles, syringes with needles attached, lancets; bulk (drippable, pourable) amounts of human blood and body fluids; human tissue; microbiological laboratory waste; and tissue, blood or body fluids from animals known to be infected with a zoonotic infectious disease. Items commonly thought to be infectious waste but which are usually not, include: items which are not saturated with blood, such as blood-spotted bandages, clothing, gloves, sanitary napkins, drapes; syringes and IV tubing without needles attached; diapers; and waste glass. For a more complete list of items that are and are not presumed to be infectious waste, see s. NR 526.05, Wis. Adm. Code.

NOTE: Broken mercury thermometers are hazardous waste and should NOT be put in infectious waste containers. Recycle your mercury-containing products and equipment before they break or spill! See DNR's Medical Waste Publication Order Form or "References: Health Care and Medical Waste" for web sites, videos and publications about reducing mercury in medical waste.

Containment Place sharps in rigid puncture-resistant containers with secure lids or caps. Acceptable containers include commercially-available sharps containers or heavy plastic detergent or bleach bottles with screw caps. Unacceptable containers include coffee cans (their lids are too easily punctured), plastic milk jugs, plastic bags, pop cans or soda bottles. Sharps containers must be labeled with a bio-hazard emblem or with the words "bio-hazard", "sharps" or "infectious waste". DO NOT add bleach to the container; bleach may not completely disinfect needles, and it could spill and injure you or waste handlers.

Place other infectious wastes in a plastic bag that is both puncture- and tear-resistant. If necessary, use two bags. Rigid reusable containers are also acceptable as long as they are disinfected after being emptied. Place

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the sealed bag in a rigid shipping container, e.g., corrugated cardboard box, a covered reusable container or a cart. The rigid container must be labeled with a bio-hazard emblem and the word "bio-hazard". Don't re-open bags or containers except to prevent spills or leakage. (See s. NR 526.07, Wis. Adm. Code.)

Storage and transportation Infectious waste containers may be stored up to 90 days after they are full. If transporting less than 50 lb. of untreated infectious waste every month, you don't need a special license. The waste must go to a licensed storage or treatment facility or to a place, such as a hospital or sharps collection station, where it will be treated properly. (See ss. NR 526.09(4) and .10(3), Wis. Adm. Code.)

Sharps disposal Try finding a registered "sharps collection station" - one of more than 430 pharmacy, healthcare providers or government agencies which collect discarded sharps as a public service (at or below cost). While some serve only home generators, many accept sharps from generators like you. To locate a station near you, call the DNR (see bottom of page) or the American Diabetes Association (1-888-342-2383) or order a list of registered stations using the DNR's Medical Waste Publication Order Form.

Alternatively, you may accept sharps from other small generators as long as you take in no more than the amount you generate. You may also transport sharps for others, such as home-bound or rural generators. If you wish to accept more than you generate or if transporting others' sharps would put you over the 50 lb/mo transportation limit, you must register as a sharps collection station. Registration is free and simple and is described in the "Sharps Collection" guidance, available from DNR.

Recordkeeping You must keep records of the waste you send off-site for treatment and treat on-site, and save the records for at least 3 years. **If you use a licensed infectious waste hauler**, keep a copy of the infectious waste manifest (shipping paper) and the written evidence that your waste has been destroyed, which, by law, the treatment facility must provide to you (see ss. NR 526.14 and .15, Wis. Adm. Code.) **If you transport your waste yourself**, keep a simple log stating the dates, amounts of waste, and where you took it. **If you treat your own waste** by autoclaving or other means, follow the minimum requirements in ss. NR 526.11 and .12(4) for operating and testing your equipment and for keeping records. Treated infectious waste can be disposed of with other solid waste, except for sharps, which must be rendered both non-infectious and unusable (by grinding or breaking).

Annual reports If you send more than 50 lb. away for treatment in any one month of a year, you must file an infectious waste annual report for that year and pay a \$50 filing fee. You may order an annual report (Publication WA-809) using the DNR's Medical Waste Publication Order Form. If you are close to the 50 lb. limit, you may be able to avoid having to file in the future by reducing your waste. Refer to the ideas under "Cost reduction," below.

Medical waste reduction plans This paragraph applies only to hospitals, clinics (including single doctor's offices) and nursing homes. If you *generate* more than 50 lb/month of "medical waste" (defined as infectious waste plus anything mixed with it), you must audit your waste, prepare and implement a "medical waste reduction plan" and file infectious waste annual reports. Sections NR 526.16 to .22, Wis. Adm. Code, explain exactly what to do, and these are discussed in the publication "Medical Waste Reduction and the Annual Report," WA-802. Many resources are available to help you write the plan; they are listed in DNR's fact sheet "References: Health Care and Medical Waste."

Cost reduction Although you may not dispose of untreated infectious waste in landfills, there are ways to cut costs of waste disposal. Consider these ideas:

Manage infectious wastes together with other generators. Generators in the same building or property who manage waste together are called "groups of generators" and submit only one annual

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report on behalf of the group. Your local hospital may also accept your waste. You may work together with other generators to manage sharps by setting up a sharps collection station.

Treat your own non-sharp infectious waste according to the treatment methods allowed in s. NR 526.11. For example, autoclave it. Do not burn it. Be sure to keep records [see s. NR 526.11(4)].

Change your waste pickup schedule within the limits of your waste hauler's contract. Remember, full containers can be stored up to 90 days, but if the pickup is 50 lb. or more, you will have to file an infectious waste annual report for the year. You may reserve some waste for the next pickup.

Reduce waste Reduce packaging, use fewer disposables, substitute other products or materials, change or modify equipment. Change purchasing policies or ask your corporate office to do so. Change housekeeping practices, e.g., keep infectious wastes away from all other wastes by moving and labeling waste containers. Sell or donate unused items and equipment. Recycle items containing mercury now, before they break or spill.

Reuse waste by appropriate reprocessing, such as sterilizing, disinfecting, decontaminating, laundering, or recharging. Exchange waste or equipment with others. Sell or donate reprocessed items or equipment.

Recycle everything you can: paper, metals, plastics, cardboard, batteries and anything containing mercury.

For more information

- Visit the DNR web site <http://www.dnr.state.wi.us>, scroll to the bottom of the page, click on "waste management bureau," click on "medical waste," "frequently asked questions" or "publications."
- Order documents from the DNR using the Medical Waste Publication Order Form (Form 4400-218)
- Order "References: Health Care & Medical Wastes" (Publication WA-290) which lists non-DNR references, web sites and non-profit organizations that offer technical assistance to people like you.
- Call your local DNR office and ask for the waste management specialist.
- Call the DNR central office and ask for the medical waste coordinator. (608) 266-2111.

DISCLAIMER: This fact sheet is not intended as a substitute for the regulations and statutes that apply. Rather, it is a brief summary of the topic. Please consult Wisconsin's regulations and statutes for more information.

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